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SUBJECT: MEDIA SKEPTICS SCOFF AT CHAVEZ' COMMENTS ABOUT
US-BRV COOPERATION

REF: CARACAS 945

Classified By: Acting DCM Peggy Gennatiempo for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. C) SUMMARY Major local media outlets gave prominent attention to President Chavez' remarks calling for greater counternarcotics cooperation between the United States and Venezuela. Three major newspapers ran editorial/analysis pieces on July 8th expressing a degree of skepticism with Chavez' words. The MFA USA Desk Officer told us that the MFA will need to coordinate carefully within the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela before getting back to the Embassy on possible next steps. (End Summary)

¶2. (C) At the July 5th Venezuelan Independence Day military parade, President Chavez, in front of the diplomatic corps and state media, told the Ambassador he would like to see greater cooperation between Venezuela and the United States in drug interdiction issues. (REFTEL) The Ministry of Information and Communication later posted a statement on its web site re-iterating this message and quoting Chavez' conversation with the Ambassador. Most local media carried this story on July 6 and 7. On July 8th, three major daily papers, El Universal, El Nacional and Tal Cual, carried opinion and/or analysis pieces concerning Chavez' remarks.

¶3. (SBU) El Nacional's article stated that the comments are merely a way for Chavez to look more favorable to the electorate in the run-up to the November elections. Koeneker recalled a string of political defeats Chavez had in the past year - the failed referendum, the death of FARC leader Raul Reyes, the rescue of FARC hostage Ingrid Betancourt and the three U.S. hostages - and stated Chavez' latest remarks have "purely electoral motivations in a bid to improve an image that has been seriously damaged."

¶4. (SBU) In El Universal, Bayardo Ramirez Monagas, the former president of the now defunct National Commission Against Drugs (CANACUID), comments were that Chavez needs to go much further and take on a global fight against terrorism, organized crime and corruption, as all are tied to the drug trade. Drug trafficking, according to the article, is not a political problem and cannot be solved through only political means. In the article, Rocio San Miguel, president of the "military watchdog" NGO Civic Control Association for Security and Defense, stated that cooperation with Colombia would also need to be resumed for tactics to be effective. The article opined that Chavez' tone change has more to do with politics and image than substance.

¶5. (SBU) Political Analyst Teodoro Petkoff, in his commentary in Tal Cual, scoffed at some of Chavez' remarks and wondered if the words were meant to pave the way for a "fluent and seamless dialogue" with Colombian President Uribe, scheduled for later in the week.

¶6. (C) A/Polcouns contacted the MFA USA Desk Officer July 7 to express the Embassy's desire to follow up on President Chavez' stated interest in renewing counter-narcotics

cooperation. The MFA USA Desk Officer said MFA officials read with interest (and surprise) Chavez' statements and are "already working" this issue. She cautioned, however, that the MFA needed to "coordinate carefully" within the BRV before following up with the Embassy on the Venezuelan President's July 5 remarks to the Ambassador.

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